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ABSTRACT

For an evaluation design or "political strategy" to succeed in instituting a process of valuing and be appropriate for a particular setting, patterns of social relations and beliefs about the evaluation must be in agreement with those of the chosen evaluation design. This agreement must be in place either at the onset or occur during the evaluation process. Alignment of political power and definitions of credible knowledge is inherent in six evaluation approaches or designed which include: positivism, interpretivism, critical theory, aesthetics, collaborative research and action research. The sociology of knowledge approach is used to examine the social meaning of each of these designs. This analysis exposes much of the taken for granted assumption in each of these. Specifying types of evaluation designs that are appropriate is to define a specific potential role benefiting specific parties in the evaluation and in the educational system itself. Educators and evaluators should consider the need for, the design of and political outcomes likely in any evaluation situation and to eschew general policies about the necessity and form of evaluations. Designs should be examined from a larger perspective to understand the full social meaning of educational evaluation. (RR)

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Evaluation Designs as Political Strategies *

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INTRODUCTION

Evaluation research continues to flourish as issues of accountability and effectiveness gain attention in education. As evaluation research increases in necessity and popularity, so do claims of the "best" or "most appropriate" evaluation approaches or designs. Presumably, the results of such research are used to justify or change educational policy. House (1984:184) makes the case that each "evaluation approach entails a significant role for evaluation within the decision process". He claims that, in fact, some of the differences in designs can be accounted for by the anticipation of a different decision situation inherent in the design. Thus, a choice of an evaluation design is, in essence, a policy decision.

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Like other educational policies, educational evaluation can be subjected to analyses; this is rarely done. House (1980) argues that, to understand evaluation approaches, it is necessary to understand the ethics, epistemology and political ramifications of each. When such an attempt at analyses and understanding does occur, we find evaluation has the earmarks of a political strategy. Bredo and Feinberg (1982:430) suggest that an orientation towards research "implicitly represents a different stance towards existing authorities or a different political position." House (1980:78) insists that there must be agreement between all parties--the sponsor, the evaluator, and the evaluatees--as to "criteria, methods and procedures, access, dissemination of results and so on" for "disagreement . . . can destroy the entire credibility of the evaluation." Noblit (1984: 96) argues that any sort of applied research is "inherently political because it wishes to establish the bases of judgement for others and moreover to replace those that might otherwise be employed." The choice of the evaluation design, then, is more than a technical issue. Such designs realign political power and redefine what is credible knowledge.

In this study we will examine the alignment of political power and definitions of credible knowledge inherent in six evaluation approaches or designs: positivism, interpretivism, critical theory, aesthetics, collaborative research and action research. We will make the case that the issues of political power and credible knowledge take different forms in each of these evaluation designs. The power and credibility of those in charge (or the sponsor), the evaluator-researcher, the evaluatees and even the evaluation design itself are all at issue. Yet, beneath these more obvious issues of power and credibility are the more subtle politics of social network (Schmidt, et al., 1977) and the relative credibilities of the various knowledge bases in the

evaluation situation. We assert that each evaluation design implicitly promotes patterns of social relations and particular knowledge bases and assumptions. Thus, we argue that for an evaluation design or "political strategy" to succeed in instituting a process of valuing and be appropriate for a particular setting, patterns of social relations and beliefs about the evaluation must be in agreement with those of the chosen evaluation design; this agreement must be in place either at the outset or occur during the process of evaluation. This agreement, in the form of a dominant coalition (Benson, 1975), is an essential part of the political strategy of educational evaluation. Finally, we conclude that all the major approaches to evaluation are essentially political strategies used to create a dominant coalition.

The examination of evaluation designs as political strategies is appropriately a sociology of knowledge problem. The sociology of knowledge concerns itself with social bases, construction and effects of forms of knowledge such as evaluations (Berger and Luckman, 1966). In this case, we will use the sociology of knowledge approach to examine the social meaning of each of the six evaluation designs. First, we will describe each design as it is used in evaluation, examine the implicit or explicit patterns of social relations using Schmidt et al.'s (1977) grounded analyses of patron-client and horizontal networks, and determine which beliefs and knowledge bases are primary in each design. Second, we will propose some ideas about the political strategy of evaluation design using Benson's categories of strategies employed to bring about change in social networks (Benson, 1975). Finally, we will make some preliminary suggestions as to the appropriateness of these political strategies under specific evaluation conditions.

A SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE APPROACH

In order to consider evaluation designs as political strategies, it is necessary to understand the sociology of knowledge approach we will use to examine the social relations and belief systems that characterize the specific evaluation design. As Berger and Luckmann (1966:3) write:

> It is our contention, then, that the sociology of knowledge must concern itself with whatever passes for "knowledge" in a society regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such "knowledge". And insofar as all human knowledge is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations, the sociology of knowledge must seek to understand the processes by which this is done in such a way that a taken-for-granted "reality" congeals for the man in the street.

This approach has been employed with some success in the study of education. Noblit (1984) used this approach to examine the prospects for ethnography in educational research and evaluation, revealing that the tenets of qualitative research are threatened in applied research endeavors. Bowers (1984:vii) went beyond an analysis of relating effects of modernization "to show how the sociology of knowledge can be used to develop a theory of education." In this article, we will examine evaluation designs as proposed sets of social relations and beliefs that evaluators wish to establish in evaluation situations. Our argument is that evaluators seek to create a set of social relations and beliefs that facilitate access to the evaluation situation, develop commitment of participants to the evaluation, and enable the evaluation to be politically salient. In this way, we argue evaluation designs can be considered, at least in part, as political strategies.

To examine the social relations of evaluation design, we will use social network theory (Schmidt, et al, 1977). The study of social networks has developed as a grounded "theory" of social relations that has been termed

"political clientelism" (Schmidt, et al, 1977). In its briefest form, political clientelism posits that networks are maintained by exchanges of favors in such a way that an obligation to reciprocate is engendered. Some (horizontal) networks can be more or less of equals in power and status, and network relations maintain that equality. Other (vertical) networks consist of patrons and clients. In these networks, clients typically exchange deference and loyalty to the patron for the patron's protection and support. Again, network relations maintain this essential inequality. Evaluation situations generally involve three sets of parties: the evaluators, the evaluatees, and the sponsors of the evaluation, although in some designs the sponsors may well be the evaluatees. We will use political clientelism to analyze the sets of social relations and relative power among these parties in each design.

Belief systems may be conceptualized in many ways--as culture, values, and/or ideology. Yet in evaluation, the essential beliefs concern the relative credibility of the knowledge systems of the parties to the evaluation. Evaluation designs are intended to establish the credibility of the knowledge the evaluation generates (House, 1980). For our purposes, it is necessary to examine the relative credibility of the parties' knowledge systems in each design and how designs may seek to alter this in the process of creating a credible evaluation.

In what follows, we will reconsider the evaluation designs of positivism, interpretivism, critical theory, aesthetics, collaborative research and action research as political strategies. The six designs are not always distinct. Collaborative researchers may employ interpretivist ideas, as may aesthetics. Action researchers may be rather positivistic. Critical theory is maintained to encompass and go beyond both interpretivism and positivism.

Research projects may be both collaborative and action research. Yet since each evaluation design seeks to create a distinct set of social relations and beliefs, it is useful to examine the six approaches as discrete entities. Further, in the sociology of knowledge, all six approaches are worthy of parallel consideration. Some may wish to accord a lofty status to positivism, interpretivism and critical theory. But, following Berger and Luckmann, we would caution such a presumption. All are ways of knowing in evaluation research and deserve parallel treatment. Because all are parallel for the purposes of this analysis, the terms "designs" and "approaches" are used interchangeably and do not connote a hierarchical ordering.

This reconsideration of evaluation should not be taken to imply that we believe evaluation designs are only political strategies, for that is not the case. Evaluation designs are many things besides political strategies, but we would argue <u>at their base</u> they are political strategies. Further, it should not be inferred that because we see evaluations as political that evaluations are not worthy social processes. If anything, the analysis that follows establishes that evaluations are recognizable processes through which values and, thus worthiness, is created.

EVALUATION DESIGNS

<u>Positivism</u>

Positivism extolls science as the superior way of knowing and the scientist as the expert, or credible agent. Knowledge is discovered through a reductionistic epistemology using a traditional scientific methodology. Objectivity is a key element in this methodology and, according to Kerlinger, "is a most important methodological aspect of science" which is achieved when

"the procedure can be repeated with the same or similar results" (Kerlinger, 1979:8-9). Furthermore, he states that "objectivity is important because it can help provide more trustworthy explanations of natural phenomena" (Kerlinger, 1979:11). In this approach, human systems are viewed in terms of a linear cause-effect model. Human events are seen as part of the natural world and, therefore, lawful. Smith argues that "these laws describe in neutral scientific language how . . . independently existing reality really operates" (1983:11). He continues by saying that the laws are, "by definition, universally applicable regardless of time and place" (Smith, 1983:11). As applied to educational evaluation, a positivistic design provides a utilitarian approach to solving evaluation issues "to explain, and by extension to be able to predict, the relationship between or the invariant succession of educational objects and events" (Smith, 1983:11).

The evaluator-scientist role in this approach is one of the credible expert. His/her scientific expertise is used to legitimate this status as well as the evaluation design itself. Interpersonal skills are only minimally required and the relationship between the evaluator and evaluatees is often distant in the pursuit of objectivity. The evaluator-scientist relies on the authoritarian relations between the sponsor and the evaluatees to gain access to and maintain relations with the evaluatees.

The implementation of a positivistic evaluation design clearly assumes social relations which are defined according to carefully delimited patron-client networks. Initially, the evaluator-scientist is client to the patron-sponsor. He/she must show deference and loyalty during the careful negotiation of contract domains to gain access to the evaluatees and to assure power and credibility during the evaluation process. At this juncture, the

evaluator-scientist theoretically becomes patron to both the sponsor and evaluatees. However, the sponsor may maintain certain aspects of patronage toward the evaluator as regards evaluation results upon which sponsor decisions are to be made. After access is gained, the evaluatees become a clientele to the evaluator-patron. This patron status is largely based in technical expertise and is reinforced by the access given to the evaluator by the sponsor.

The sponsor in this design is, in the end, also a client to the patron-scientist while continuing to be a patron to the evaluatees. If weak horizontal networks are present among the evaluatees, as might be expected in loosely-coupled educational organizations (Weick, 1982), evaluatee clientelism is maintained by authoritarian relations previously established between the evaluatees and sponsor. However, if strong horizontal evaluatee networks exist or develop during the evaluation process, and these networks have an on-going basis of exchange, the evaluatee client networks can gain power and undermine the evaluation by playing off one patron against the other (i.e., the sponsor and the evaluator).

The belief system required by the positivistic design is one of reification of science. Credibility rests on the agreement by all parties that science is indeed an appropriate basis upon which to evaluate and make decisions. The utilitarian nature inherent in this model would seem to demand that knowledge gained would be instrumental or "practical", presumably for the evaluatees. However, such knowledge may be instrumental only in terms of assuring a justification for sponsor decisions and reinforcement of science and the scientific method as appropriate (House, 1980). Thus, knowledge discovered through a positivistic evaluation model is in service of patrons rather than

clients with the design serving to promote the authority of legitimate rather than authentic knowledge (Gouldner, 1070).

Interpretivism

Interpretivism, in many ways, is the original basis of sociology and anthropology and recently has been experiencing a considerable resurgence. As Patton (1980) has argued, it is a dramatic alternative to positivism, focusing on putting the meaning of social situations in relevant contexts (Mishler, 1979). Spicer (1976) proposes that the approach is characterized as 1) emic (grounded in the experiences of the participants); 2) holistic; 3) historical; and 4) comparative. In interpretive evaluations, the evaluator typically observes and interviews the parties to the evaluation to construct a "reading" (Geertz, 1973) of the "multiperspectival realities" (Douglas, 1976) of the situation being evaluated. The result typically is a written account taking the form of an ethnography or case study that, at least in part, is submitted to be reviewed by the various parties to the evaluation. While interpretivists often view their role to end with the completion of the research endeavor and its sharing, they will often propose that taking action based on the evaluation is not as straightforward as the sponsor or evaluatees may believe. As interpretivists will argue, the source of problems in an educational program may largely be the assumptions involved in creating the situation, and less so in technical deficiences in program design or implementation. As evaluations, interpretivist accounts often have low instrumental value and may yield unanticipated results and other consequences.

Interpretivists see their evaluator role to be one of revealing such taken-for-granted assumptions. Since interpretivists are cautious about

proposing an instrumental value to their evaluations, they focus more on developing relationships that first provide access to the situation and, over time, create trust in the evaluator. For interpretivists, though, the question of "whose side are we on?" (Becker, 1967) looms throughout the evaluation. This question is resolved either by consciously "going native" (Wolcott, 1977) or by providing a descriptive account that puts the case of each "side" into an understandable context. Thus, the evaluator must have considerable experience in data collection techniques and in rendering a coherent and credible account (House, 1980).

The social relations of an interpretive evaluation, thus, are complex and changing. The interpretivist usually negotiates for the unique status of a "voyeur", a person who is able to watch universally but reserves the right to decide when participation is appropriate. In doing so, the interpretive evaluator maintains a distance from the normal authority structures present in the situation, carefully avoiding becoming an exclusive member of any network. This role, then, is of a "broker" between social networks, yet withholds actually transmitting messages or facilitating social exchanges until the end of the evaluation.

The evaluatees in an interpretive evaluation are expected to grant access of various sorts to the evaluator. However, they are not assumed to trust the evaluator or the evaluation, as interpretivists view trust as being earned through ongoing social interaction. In granting access, the sponsor-evaluatees in many ways are behaving altruistically. Access, then, is the result of a sponsor with sufficient authority and/or patron status vis-a-vis the evaluatee's clientelism, or of existing inter-network relations that include the evaluator prior to the evaluation. In any case, the evaluator avoids being

either a patron or client, while the evaluatee becomes dependent on the good faith of the evaluator. In our experience, both sponsors and evaluatees resolve this by coming to believe that the evaluator's account will vindicate their position and actions (cf. Collins and Noblit, 1978).

Unlike some of the other evaluation designs discussed here, interpretivism does not entail a prior belief concerning the legitimacy of the approach; rather only access is required. Interpretivists disavow the usual bases of legitimacy such as content expertise, instrumental utility, or authority. Yet it is expected that over time both trust and the legitimacy of the evaluation will be negotiated. That is to say, interpretivists seek to create a belief in the legitimacy of the evaluation in question, and interpretivism in general. In this way, interpretivists seek converts, and if the conversion is complete, assume the role of a compassionate and even-handed patron to the evaluatees and sponsor. Loyalty and deference may be exchanged for the protection of a "democratic" multiperspectival reality and the support of the evaluator-patron. If the interpretivist-evaluator cannot achieve this patron status, the evaluation may be rejected as biased and/or not useful. In the end, interpretivist evaluations are constructivist of both belief systems and patron-client relations.

Critical Theory

Critical theory as a mode of evaluation is not as popular as the other approaches we discuss here (Bredo and Feinburg, 1982). Yet we have seen its popularity increase in education in recent years (cf. Giroux, 1981). Critical theory is essentially the critique of ideologies which justify domination. In Habermas' formulation, ideology distorts communication by masking social

contradictions, making it difficult for individuals to discern the ideological content of the beliefs that structure their lives and their consciousness (Geuss, 1981). The critical theorist would have people emancipated from ideological domination through a program of dialogue and discourse (dialogue about the nature of communication itself) designed to promote self-reflection and, consequently, enlightenment and emancipation. Such an evaluation program requires, however, that the evaluator can create an approximation of an "ideal speech situation" which allows free and uncoerced discussion (Habermas, 1970). Comstock (1982:379-386) details the critical method as involving seven steps:

1. Identify movements or social groups whose interests are progressive.
2. Develop an interpretive understanding of the intersubjective meanings, values, and motives held by all groups of actors in the subjects' milieu.
3. Study the historical development of the social conditions and the current social structures that constrain the participants' actions and shape their understandings.
4. Construct models of the determinate relations between social conditions, intersubjective interpretations of those conditions, and participants' actions.
5. Elucidate the fundamental contradictions which are developing as a result of current actions based on ideologically frozen understandings.
6. Participate in a program of education with the subjects that gives them new ways of seeing their situation.

7. Participate in a theoretically grounded program of action which will change social conditions and, in addition, will engender new less alientated understandings and needs.

An evaluation based in critical theory is largely participative, trying to facilitate the evaluatees' free and uncoerced discussion of their situation. Yet if we examine Comstock's program, we see that the role of the evaluator-critical theorist is one of first among equals. The evaluator-critical theorist has expertise in critique as a genre as well as in the process of facilitating the ideal speech situation and the dialogue and discourse that ensues. Further, to the extent that such discourse must be based in evidence about social conditions, intersubjective meanings and the connections between the two, the evaluator-critical theorist also may have roles approximating those of the positivist or interpretivist.

The social relations involved in a critical theory evaluation are obviously delicate. The evaluator-critical theorist is in many ways a supreme patron, providing both content and process direction in the service of free and uncoerced dialogue. The evaluator-critical theorist must continually legitimate critique as a genre and reassure the evaluatees of the value of shedding their false consciousness. The evaluatees, at least initially, are clientele to the critical theorist's patronage, in the sense that they must commit to follow the patron to some enticing, yet unspecified, and in many ways, unpredictable end. They engage in the approximation of the ideal speech situation as equals among themselves, free to discern ideological distortions as they see them, and free even to decide not to proceed with a course of action once ideologies are revealed (Geuss, 1981). Yet they are not equal to the evaluator-critical theorist in creating the content and process through which this occurs. An

evaluation based in critical theory would be wary of an outside sponsor, since the interests of a sponsor may well perpetuate ideological distortions. Any outside sponsor would, of necessity then, be more of a philanthropist, providing resources for others to do with as they wish.

As is evident in Comstock's program, a critical theory evaluation requires a set of prior beliefs. This prior set of beliefs is what Collins (1982) refers to as the Durkheimian notion of the "precontractual basis of solidarity" inherent in social contracts. Durkheim has posited that every social contract, in this case that of evaluation, actually entails two contracts. The first is the consciously agreed-upon contract, that of engaging in an evaluation using a particular approach. The second is the "hidden contract" that rests on the implicit assumption that all participants agree to the rules of the first contract (Collins, 1982). Thus, a critical theory evaluation, like the remainder of the designs we will examine, entails this precontractual basis of solidarity or set of prior beliefs.

In critical theory, the agreed-upon contract includes agreement concerning the need to shed delusions, a predisposition to critique as the genre in which to do so, and an interest in emancipation. Beliefs in the instrumental or technical value of the evaluation is not required and indeed may be exposed as ideology in the process. What is intriguing about the critical theory approach is that while the evaluator is a strong patron, there is no suspension of belief in the vested interests of the evaluator-critical theorist. Indeed, since to critical theorists all knowledge has interests (Habermas, 1971), the interests of the evaluator, as well as of evaluatees, are subject to examination and reflection. Nevertheless, as part of the "hidden contract," a critical theory evaluation in the end requires that the evaluatees believe that the

evaluator is serving their best interests.

Aesthetics

Aesthetics is another type of qualitative approach to evaluation (Eisner, 1979; House, 1980). In Eisner's formulation, aesthetic evaluation involves both "connoisseurship" and "criticism". Connoisseurship involves the "art of appreciation" (p. 14). The evaluator must have "developed a highly differentiated array of anticipatory schema that enable one to discern qualities and relationships that others, less well differentiated, are less likely to see" (p. 14). Connoisseurship is necessary to aesthetic evaluations in that ". . . it provides the content for our knowing. It makes possible the stuff we use for reflection" (p.15). Yet to Eisner, connoisseurship is private, not public. To make it public, it must be transformed into a form that others can understand. This is the role of criticism. Criticism entails first creating an artistic description so that others may "vicariously participate" (p. 15) in the events at issue. Second, criticism includes rendering an interpretation by ". . . applying theoretical ideas to explain the conditions that have been described" (p. 16). Third, criticism involves an appraisal. This appraisal is not in the form of an outcome-based evaluation. Rather it is to provide constructive criticism, " . . . providing the conditions that lead to the improvement of the educational process" (p.16).

Eisner and his students have conceived of the role of the evaluator to be one that provides "a fresh eye" (p.17). To do so, he argues that interpersonal skills and trust are essential between the critic and evaluatee: "The teacher must be willing to have a critic in the classroom and must be willing to listen (but not necessarily heed) to what the critic says" (p. 17).

In Eisner's view, this relationship is one of a dialogue between friends.

Yet on closer analysis, the social basis of aesthetics involves social relations that are not typically friendship relations. The evaluator-critic must have considerable expertise to be recognized as credible, yet also be sufficiently independent of other power and authority relations so that the evaluatee is willing to participate in good faith and to trust the evaluator-critic. The evaluatee must believe that improvement is so desirable as to seek a "fresh eye." Nevertheless, the evaluatee is dependent on the critic for insight and direction. Eisner argues that schools should provide "structures" (p.17) for observation and reflection, but is clear that connoisseurship and criticism concerns the particular not the universal, rendering aesthetic evaluation not amenable to bureaucratic ends.

The social relations between evaluator-critic and evaluatee involve a subtle dependency of the evaluatee on the expertise of the evaluator-critic without requiring compliance, much like the ideal speech situation in critical theory. Any sponsors outside of this dyadic relationship are simply to provide the opportunity for the evaluation, with the faith that improvement will occur. Intriguingly, the evaluator-critic is not in a patron status as he/she is unable to provide protection and support within the authority of the educational organization. The sponsor, on the other hand, is more like a patron of the arts than a direct supervisor to either party. He/she must believe in the value of aesthetics and sponsor its practice, but not be assured of any instrumental gain for the organization, except possibly in social status or in the evaluatee's internal motivations.

Aesthetics, like other designs, seem to involve a precontractual basis of solidarity (Collins, 1982). The conscious contract is an expression of

belief in the legitimacy of art criticism as applied to educational practice. Parties must believe that the pursuit of creative expression is instrumentally valuable. On the other hand, the hidden contract requires a suspension of belief on the part of the evaluatee in the vested interests of the evaluator-critic and sponsor. Altruism for all parties is assumed. Trust and skills in interpersonal relations are to hold the relationships and beliefs together. Aesthetic evaluations require that the evaluation be not a goal but an expression of key values that in the end reinforce an altruistic belief in aesthetics.

Collaborative Research

Torbet (1981:150) defines collaborative inquiry as "self-study in action"--an incomplete, ongoing, experiential process. Collaborative research assumes that research and action are inseparable, except in an analytic sense, and that knowledge comes through and for action. Collaborative inquiry diminishes some of the substantive differences that can be present among practitioners, sponsors and evaluators (Schlechty and Noblit, 1982) since the "we-ness" of research is emphasized in this approach. In collaborative evaluation, all aspects are negotiated--the research design, the roles of all participants and the issues. The design of collaborative inquiry, then, is not pre-defined nor necessarily stable but is an evolutionary, developmental process (Torbet, 1981).

The evaluator in collaborative inquiry must develop a "shared reality" with all other participants in terms of belief in the collaborative process, role domains and evaluation issues. Thus, the evaluator's role must be or must become one of an interested agent within the evaluation process.

Collaborative inquiry in its "purest" form requires relative equality of power. This requirement presupposes that social relations are in place prior to the evaluation and that socially enforced equality is maintained through negotiation and active bargaining. Networks within a collaborative design are, in essence, an alliance based on mutual trust and belief rather than one of patrons or clients. Thus, whether the participants are technically evaluator, sponsor or evaluatee, they must operate as a horizontal network with the interests of all parties given equal consideration. Yet if collaboration is to achieve an evaluation or a reevaluation of a setting, it must avoid "group think" characteristics of groups together over time. This typically is the job of the evaluator (Schlechty and Noblit, 1982; Newman and Noblit, 1982) who takes the role of representative. The evaluator in the collaborative endeavor represents perspectives from outside the evaluation situation as well as representing the collaboration's perspectives to wider audiences. The evaluator thus assumes an instrumental expertise as a translator. In social networks, this is akin to the role of a "broker" who, in transmitting a message, also invariably alters its content (Lande, 1977). Collaborative research creates a horizontal network and ideally avoids creating patrons. Yet the evaluator-as-broker is a boundary-spanning member of the social network and thus has a subtle, manipulative power upon which the fruits of collaboration are dependent.

It is also true that evaluations using a collaborative design require a "precontractual basis of solidarity" (Collins, 1982). Legitimate knowledge is process knowledge, not substantive knowledge. The reification of this collaborative process is the basis of the conscious contract. In practice, however, the hidden contract requires a prior trust in the other participants

that the negotiated social contract will not be violated. This social contract is definitive only in requiring collaboration and not in specifying a substantive knowledge base as credible.

Essentially, there are no real "results" in a collaborative evaluation as these evaluations can be considered ongoing "experiments in practice" (Torbet, 1981:147). Certainly there is no seeking after instrumental or legitimate knowledge. Rather, Torbet (1981:151) states that collaborative inquiry is a seeking of "valid social knowledge" for the participants to develop and apply to their everyday lives.

Action Research

Action research has several commonalities with collaborative research and, in fact, differences in the two may be virtually non-discernable in actual practice. However, we believe theoretically there are differences worth examining in the context of evaluation as political strategy.

Action research insists that the interests of the practitioner be primary. The particular method of the evaluation is not as important as its appropriateness to the environment, problem and participants (Nixon, 1981). Although there is variability in action research designs, Sanford (1981:178-9) promotes a model of action research entailing the following features: 1) practical, open-ended questions, 2) the promotion of individual development, and 3) practitioner planning which supersedes planning by "experts". Because of its emphasis on practicality, appropriateness and applicability, action research may actually be antithetical to evaluation as a process of revaluing a situation. Nonetheless, the action research approach is being adopted as a mode of evaluation and supervision in many situations, perhaps because it attempts to

fill the gap between research and practice through a practice emphasis. In fact, action research uses evaluatee or practitioner world view as the most credible knowledge base.

The role of the evaluator within action research requires that he/she suspend all personal and professional beliefs about the evaluation issue(s) and setting and believe single-mindedly in the priority of the practitioner. The evaluator must establish him/herself as a credible technician to the practitioner as well as a trusted reporter at the conclusion of the evaluation.

This evaluation design is the only one in which the evaluator is ultimately the client to the evaluatees. Although this evaluator clientelism changes somewhat from the initiation to the conclusion of the process, the social networks remain relatively intact. Initially, the evaluator evidences deference and loyalty to the patron-evaluatees through his/her total attention to practitioner-defined issues. The evaluator may prompt action, but it must be justified in terms of practical knowledge as defined by the participants. At the conclusion of the process, the evaluator assumes a representative role, being charged with reporting the results obtained. However, any evaluation results would have been previously approved by the evaluatees (Sanford, 1981:178), reinforcing their patron status. Evaluatees would not necessarily feel the need to fulfill a clientele role of deference and loyalty to the evaluator since sponsor and evaluator power and authority do not exist within this design. Should a sponsor have a role in the process, generally in the initiation phases, the sponsor essentially "disappears" as is the case in the aesthetic design.

The belief system inherent in action research again requires a "precontractual basis of solidarity" (Collins, 1982). Action research is

predicated on the prior agreed-upon contract that the practitioner is the expert and that the process and results of action research are legitimate and credible. Practitioner knowledge, or local knowledge (Geertz, 1973) is tthe significant knowledge base. The knowledge gained is considered authentic and instrumental, unlike the more formal knowledge bases of positivism, interpretivism and critical theory. Like the aesthetic designs, the hidden contract in action research necessitates the suspension of belief by the evaluatees concerning the vested interests of the sponsor(s) and/or the evaluator. Any sponsor operates under the altruistic belief that the process and results will be valuable for the practitioner-evaluatees and, therefore, that the action research evaluation is justified. Moreover, action research is as technical as positivism for it reifies practical and authentic knowledge. However, unlike positivism, it does so in the service of the interests of the usual underdog in evaluations, the practitioner.

THE POLITICAL STRATEGY OF EVALUATION

We have made the case in this paper that evaluation is a socially-created "reality" that alters social relations and beliefs during the process. Because of these alterations, we have posited that evaluation designs are actually political strategies and that evaluation as a <u>successful</u> political strategy seeks to maintain or create a dominant coalition (Benson, 1975). Each of the evaluation designs we have discussed seek dominant coalitions of some sort. The designs vary in the political basis of the coalition and the potential political outcomes.

Benson (1975) defines four strategies employed to produce social network change and attain the social agreement necessary for the formation of a

dominant coalition. These four strategies--authoritarian, manipulative, cooperative, and disruptive--are predicated upon conditions of relative power imbalance or balance. Benson argues that authoritarian and/or disruptive strategies are necessary for successful network change under conditions of substantial power imbalance. Manipulative and cooperative strategies must be employed where relative autonomy or power vis-a-vis all other parties exists (Benson, 1975). Using Benson's conditions for strategic network change in combination with our examination of social network relations, it becomes apparent that each of the six designs reflect patterns of relative network power. Strong patron-client networks, and thus a power imbalance, exist within three designs--positivism, critical theory and action research. Relative autonomy or power equality forms the basis for the remaining three--aesthetics, interpretivism and collaboration.

Benson discusses resources as the other significant factor in his discussion of political strategies for change. We would assert that beliefs about credible knowledge are the major resource in the evaluation situation. Using our original criteria of credibility of knowledge within each evaluation design, credible knowledge can be classified in two categories, externally legitimated and locally legitimated. Again, there is a pattern seen within the six designs in terms of credible knowledge. Three approaches--positivism, critical theory, and aesthetics--are dependent upon a credible externally legitimated knowledge. Conversely, action research, interpretivism, and collaborative research designs value locally legitimated knowledge as credible.

If we combine this analysis of the six designs along the dimensions of power and credibility, the resulting table (see Figure 1 below) suggests the conditions under which each of the six evaluation approaches would be successful

as a political strategy to fashion a dominant coalition.

Insert Figure 1 here

When there is a high power imbalance in favor of those in authority and an externally legitimated belief in science as a credible way to know something, positivistic evaluation designs are most likely to fashion a dominant coalition. Under similar conditions, except that the externally legitimated knowledge base involves the process and substance of critique, critical theory is the effective strategy to achieve a dominant coalition. A high power imbalance (towards the evaluatees) coupled with locally legitimated knowledge are the conditions under which action research is an effective political strategy.

Under the conditions of a low power imbalance and an externally legitimated knowledge base that is personified in experts, aesthetic designs seem to be the appropriate mechanism by which to fashion a dominant coalition. Low power imbalance and a belief in locally legitimated knowledge indicate two appropriate designs. When the knowledge legitimated is that of the practitioner, collaborative research is the political strategy to fashion a dominant coalition. When the legitimated local knowledge is less based in practitioner expertise and more in a belief that what takes place "here" is more worthy than knowledge bases external to the evaluation situation, interpretivism is the political strategy of choice.

In the final analysis, however, it would be a mistake to consider the conditions and the resulting appropriate design as absolute. In practice, the choice of an evaluation design is recognized, we would argue, as a political

strategy and such a choice may alter the conditions themselves. We expect that politically successful (in terms of fashioning a dominant coalition) evaluations are iterative processes, a series of moves and countermoves that, in the end, produce a design or series of designs. This seems to require evaluators that are politically adept and methdologically flexible.

CONCLUSIONS

It is apparent from our analysis here that a sociology of knowledge approach exposes much of the taken-for-granted assumptions in evaluation research. Evaluators seem to take a number of things for granted. First, regardless of the design they employ, they take-for-granted that evaluation research does not have the characteristics of other social situations. Our analysis shows that this is not fully the case. Evaluation situations have the same bases in patterns of social relations and beliefs as any other social endeavor. Evaluation designs are not only political strategies, but they must be considered as political as any other social design, plan or program. Second and related, (specific) evaluators take for granted that the evaluatees will suspend a belief in the vested interests of the parties to the evaluation. That is, that the evaluatees will also accord evaluation a special status and treat it as an unusual social situation. Third, many evaluators take for granted a "precontractual basis of solidarity" in an evaluation situation. Positivists assume it emerges from the legitimacy of science. Action researchers, collaborative researchers, critical theorists and asesthetic evaluators all also argue that trust is a precondition. Only the interpretivists, as is consistent with their approach, view trust as something to be developed through the usual processes of social interaction. Fourth, evaluation researchers seem to take

for granted that the salient outcome of the evaluation situation is a factual report and/or a set of values upon which future actions can be based. Our analysis suggests that another salient outcome is a new political arrangement between the parties to the evaluation situation. Further, we would argue that this may well be the primary basis of future action. Facts and values may be incidental in the political arrangement, but in themselves do not constitute a vehicle through which decisions will be made.

It is also apparent that we must be careful about promoting evaluation in general as a standard policy in education. Certainly, programs should be evaluated, but to have a policy requiring evaluations as a periodic and usual process is to have a policy about how political arrangements will be negotiated. To specify the kinds of evaluation designs that are appropriate, furthermore, is to define a specific political role benefiting specific parties in the evaluation situation and in the educational system itself. To us, then, educators and evaluators would do well to consider the need for, the design of, and the political outcomes likely in any specific evaluation situation, and to eschew general policies about the necessity and form of evaluations.

Finally, we would argue that evaluation designs need to be examined from a range of perspectives beyond that employed here. Only then will we understand the full social meaning of educational evaluation.

FIGURE 1

FASHIONING A DOMINANT COALITION VIA EVALUATION

	High Power Imbalance		Low Power Imbalance	
	Externally Legitimated Knowledge	Locally Legitimated Knowledge	Externally Legitimated Knowledge	Locally Legitimated Knowledge
Appropriate Evaluation Designs	Positivism Critical Theory	Action Research	Aesthetics	Interpretivism Collaborative Research

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